

A
LETTER
OF
RELIGION
TO THE
PROTESTANT-DISSENTERS
FROM

The Church of *England*, of what denomination soever in the County of *Kent*; wherein is reported the Ground of their Dissent, their Worship, way of Instruction, and behaviour towards Laws and Government.

To which is added

A perswasive to Conformity, at least an acquiescence
in the Religion established:

By a Curate of the same County.

L O N D O N :

Printed for *Cbr. Wilkinson* over against St. Dun-
stons Church, in *Fleetstreet*. 1675.

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A permissive to Conformity, at least an acquiescence in the Religion established:

By a Committee of the House of Commons.

LONDON:

Printed for C^o. Widdowson over against St. Dun-
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LETTER, &c.

IF I thought it would any thing contribute to the success of this Paper to let down particular Motives, by which I became perswaded to write to you; I would not have forgone the pains, though it had cost me a long, and distinct Paragraph. I hope it may be enough to say, that I am one of the meanest Clergy-men in the Church of *England*, in whom there should be always a Conscience of its condition, and a zeal to do any office, that is but probable for its peace and establishment; and moreover, that I think there is something in the present guise of Affairs, that may call you at this time to heed any man, or any thing, that means no worse, than to awaken you after many, to another consideration.

I have assigned my Paper to you of *Kent*, because dwelling in the same County, I have been more capable to observe you in such particulars, as are here considered, and not knowing but the dissenters of other Counties may not be such, as you, in all the Articles and practices of your dissent from the Church of *England*, I therefore shall leave them to others who have greater abilities, and better opportunities to deal with them. And though in *London* for an hundred good Reasons, the Heads of all dissenters may be presum'd to reside (for that is the Motint, from whence a long time you have

had your various Patterns) yet considering my own insufficiency to manage any matter, and withal, that there are many in the same City of strength, and warmth enough to take knowledge of, and reprove too, any thing contrary, or prejudicial to the established Religion in their ablest Adversaries, I betake my self to the weaker Country, and leave them to convince and persuade, at least to mind those Head-men of the City, in what Opinions and Practises they will continue to live.

The beginning of my attempt on you shall be thus fair; as first to lay together those grounds of dissent, which either in Print or Discourse I have found owned by such among you, who think they can give Reasons for their dissent. Yet, before I do this, it is perhaps but very needful to interpose thus much, and to tell you (especially those among you who boast of number) that there are many practical Dissenters from us, and appear mostly at your Assemblies, who cannot be suspected to have any grounds, and indeed have none, or no other, but what are so apparently weak, that themselves are ashamed to confess them, notwithstanding they are wholly managed by them; and, when they are contested with, are forc'd to say them (in another dress) or nothing. For there are many conducted to your Societies, and fill your Meeting-houses, on no better score than *Curiosity*, *Discontent*, *Design*, *Dependence*, and *Obedience*. In which enumeration, because there is one good word or two (which you are wont to take presently for good Arguments) give me leave to call them over again, and annex unto them a small Paraphrase.

1. *Curiosity*. I know not, whether old descriptions of Virtues or Vices will serve those of the present Age, for 'tis conceited our Virtues are greater, but known (I am sure) that
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our Vices are not less, and even in this particular of *Curiosity*, which School-Divinity hath reckoned for a Vice: for, thou h more knowledge be the pretence, yet the appetite may be inordinate, perverse, and vitious, even after knowledge. And such surely is That, which shall engage men to leave their immediate places, and duties to pursue an idle inspection and acquaintance with the Practises and Opinions of others; and for love of this satisfaction only, shall address themselves to every Meeting-house and place of Conventicle, intending to make no more gain thereby, either to themselves or others, than to be able to become pleasant, and talkative about divers manners, matters, and Persons, over their Meat, Wine, and Coffee; of this sort there are not a few among you, and of whom you are not all ignorant; for it needs no proof, they are not careful to conceal themselves, nor apprehensive of any injury done to them, when they are censured, as curious: Not that I think you have all the curious ones among you; or that this sort of *Curiosity* is all that is to be found among the Professors of Religion; for indeed there is more, as is evident by such Questions, as are very familiar with us; which, though Fashion and Custome do now save from being condemn'd commonly, yet nothing but *Curiosity* is in their birth and original. For not to go further, who can give any better account of this, or the like Quest. How doth Mr. A. B. preach, or was it a good Sermon? Supposing there was nothing preached but the common and invariable truths of the Gospel, as is for the most part supposed by such Inquirers: for the Questions, and the designe of them that so ask rarely refer to truth or falsehood, which are Questions only material in instructing men to Salvation, and therefore these Questions are made to know, with what voice, face, gesture, or perhaps method 'tis preach'd, which are all idle *Curiosities* in so weighty

weighty an affair, as the Doctrine of Eternal Life. But to say truth, You above all others do invite the Curious and do not often suffer them to lose their labour in such a miserable quest. For you are not contented with the general and plain Doctrines of Christianity, either in preaching or hearing, but betake your selves to odd and uncouth Subjects, which do not concern the Substance of a Christian's faith, or life; but are devised, and framed to the Hypothesis of your peculiar Saintship. And when a Text containing wholesom and necessary Doctrine falls into your hand, it is so shattered into niceties, or smothered by your Phrases, that though the Curious be gratified, the plain man is little edified.

The Curious come not to you for truth, or pertinacie, but for that (whatever it be) they think they have not yet had any where else, and as long, as so much of your study is laid out to provide for them (as you have been often told) they will be your Customers. And as a man presented with a fresh Nosegay, at first will handle it gently, and often scent it, though he is sure 'twill quickly grow flat, and wither; so do the Curious with your Phrases, till their very thinking on them makes them sink in their esteem, and so would desert you as well as them, but that their Experiences make them hope, you will next time provide them more.

How many soever they be, you procure to your selves by this trifling, and how bad soever they are in themselves, yet they are not so distress'd as to want a piece of Scripture to help them, when by discourse they are reduced to that modesty as to be ashamed of a naked and profane *Curiosity*; for then (as you have taught them) their *Curiosity* is Scriptural and holy; and the Text is 1 *Thes.* 5. 21. *Prove all things, &c.* As if a man was thereby obliged to peep into every corner, and forsaking his own station to hunt after new matters to
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try his skill about, and not to stay till they are offered to him, as matters concerning, and weighty (for every matter offered to us is not worth searching into) and by those too, that we have some reason to think are affected with care and Conscience for the good of our Souls.

2. *Discontent* is another thing that hath added to the number of Dissenters, which I might call (without taking extraordinary licence to my self) spite and peevishness. For some, in whose thoughts it never entred to alter their Principles, or so much as to question the usages of the Church of *England*, have yet made too open shew of deserting the Church, by a bold frequenting your Meetings; when the only reason of so doing was some occasional heat, they have lately had with their lawful Ministers. For, if a Minister, either prest by a Conscience of his duty, or by the necessity of his condition, do venture to take a measuring-cast of the Tythes due to him from his Neighbours Farm, and would thereby adjust some mistakes and ill customs to do himself justice, if there be no Arts left for the Owner to continue the fraud, he shall be sure to find this woful revenge ready for him, *viz.* That his angry Neighbour will hear him no more. And to carry on this hasty and unwarrantable resolution, he for a while perhaps keeps at home, afterwards hovers about some neighbour Parishes, and at last settles upon a Conventicle, where, whatever his Motives were for so doing, he is sure to be welcome. And if you had leisure, or did dare to ask such a one his reasons of departure from us, and joyning with you (which were but fair in such a change) you would find the account very shameful. For it is not his love and liking of you, but his despite, and revenge to his Minister, and he commends your Exercises on no other reason, but to disgrace his Sermons. I know some of you have ways not only to salve the man's Conscience,

ence, but even to sanctifie the very occasion of leaving us ; but the great Topick, from whence your Methods are derived, is Interest not Integrity.

3. *Designe* hath helpt you much in this matter : There being some who have such desires and Projects in their Heads, (distinct enough from Religion) which can never be accomplished, but by your Success and Prosperity. You well remember (I suppose) when his Majesty was restor'd to the Throne of his Ancestors, there were many with him returned to their own Estates, that had long been under the hands, and embezelments of men, that knew how to make a good Market of an unnatural War. These men enjoy'd what they had thus basely gotten, long enough to make them in love with what they possessed, and such love they have thereto still, that they will not be out of the *Designe* for another embrace. For there are many pleasant Meadows, large Woods, and goodly Houses which yet hang in their eyes, though they do not stick in their fingers, but these can never be compensated again by them without making a new Bead roll of Delinquents, repairing to *Haberdashers-Hall*, and extirpating *Episcopacie*, that is, by bringing all things again into War and confusion. Or, if it be done peaceably, yet cannot be done without laying Bishops aside, and distributing their Lands. Now, how can any labouring with this *designe* of a re-investiture to such Lands, more properly bestow himself and his ways, than in a diligent attendance on your Conventicles, wherein Bishops have been so often declar'd your utter Enemies, and the rooting them out both your aims and prayers ? There is little in such *Designers* Consciences, to byass them more to you than to *Rome* ; but dreading that Church is not their friend in this particular, they continue with others, but on worse Principles, to cry out against her. It
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may perhaps be Objected, that all of you are not for Alienation of Church-Land, but some are against it, and are ready (as some of your Brethren at first did) to declare against it. If this be true (of which there is some suspicion) you may please to make it known at your next meeting, which will be well for us, but I doubt not for yourselves.

4. *Dependance* hath given you some advantage, which because it is various, I will only instance in such common connexions, as are every where observable to have a power to increase the bodies of any sort of men that shall think fit to separate themselves for a distinct Society. The *Dependances* which I mean, are those which have a strong relation to food and raiment, such as the Shop-keeper hath on the good Customer, and the Tenant on the hopeful Landlord, which though they are not intrinsically evil, nor the arts of obliging one and the other to be condemned, as universally dishonest; yet, if on such considerations, men shall sort themselves to a Sect, and distinguish out to themselves a meet Religion, or Religious party, they are wicked and unreasonable. Neither will it help you to say, that there are the same presumptions of such among us, and though it were true (as in this is probable) what you say. For whatever mens secret motives are in abiding with the Church of *England*, they are besides under a known Law for obedience and conformity to it, by which all men under the same Government are equally obliged, the Seller as well as the Buyer, the Tenant as well as the Landlord, which is a motive more extrinsically honest than the other can pretend unto. But to see men take a fair place in your meetings, not to see and hear best, but to be seen and noted best, to remove from thence timely to the door, and there

to abide the train of the Company in their departure, and all this time to distribute glances, smiles, and cringes according to the hopefulnes of the person going out ; and lastly, to acknowledge to their private Friends, that their Trades and livelihoods engage them so to do, whatever profit it brings to them, can be no great comfort to you, unless you are wonderfully pleased with gang and multitude. I will acknowledge that 'tis not to be believed that you can easily discriminate those from others ; or if you could, that you would exclude them ; but yet I know this to be a truth, and is to be told only those of you, who glory in your number and sincerity. My intent is to speak to such that understand and own the best appearing Grounds of Dissent and Separation ; and that I might so do, I thought it best first to set aside those persons that have none.

5. *Obedience* hath done you no hurt in your Plot of Separation, though a little more Obedience in you or them (that have on this score separated) would have done the Church of *England* much good. They that are drawn and held to you by this Argument are Children and Servants, who certainly are the most defensible of all the Families that belong to these Tribes ; considering they do in some sense assert hereby what their Parents and Masters do deny to the King, and the Church, *viz.* Obedience. There are many considerations of great efficacie to binde these persons to the very Sentiments, as well as Commandments of their domestic Superiours. 'Tis sufficient, if there were only in the case a quiet life, Trade and Portion to be forfeited by their reluctancie, and this there is too often ; to say nothing of those fearful curses some are afraid to incur being pronounced on them by their dying friends, on condition
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of returning to the obedience to the English Antichristian and Idolatrous Church.

I think the Servants are under the hardest terms, who for the most part have had other kind of Education, and come to their Masters with Catechisms, Principles and Practises according to the Church of *England*; and therefore must unlearn somethings, and disuse more in the practice of their Religion before they can comply with yours. You know a little skill in Case-Divinity will help these young people to some ease, and the very Doctrine you often needlessly press of an indispensable and prime subjection to God, will do them real good, and you know the subjection we owe to the Church, and the King for Gods-sake, supercedes the obedience we owe to Parents and Masters, if they once draw up to a competition. And 'truly 'tis pity, but these should be relieved, not only in respect of the Church and the good of their Souls, but also of their bodies, especially when they are gall'd often a whole day to huuger, to strange Prayers, and strange Propositions, whereof many of your underling Conventicles are very full, and is not unknown to your Chief Rabbies and Masters.

Let me then dismiss these as not bringing much credit to any Society, and least of all to yours, whose pretended formality and essence is to outgo others in purity of heart and life.

The ground of your Dissent is next to be lookt into, which after the most diligent search that I could make, seems finally resolved into this Principle, *viz. That nothing may be lawfully done, or used in the Church of Christ without Command or Example for it in Scripture.*

For I suppose your chief dislike of our Church is, because in its usages there are somethings inscriptural, and so I may boldly say, will be while the world stands. But this is such a Principle, that if you resolve to stand by it, and are content to abide by the just Consequences of the same, it will as well serve you against any Church, as ours, not only that of *Rome*, but *Geneva*; not only against the late magnified Platform of *Scotland*, but *New England* also.

But to be short, either you approve of this Principle, or you do not; if you do, why do you not observe it, and govern your selves within your selves by it? If you do not, why would you obtrude it on the Church of *England*, and desert her too for want of an impossible Conformity to it? For examine the next most Evangelical Assembling, and tell me, whether there be not some Circumstances in the time, place, gesture, manner of Preaching and Praying, for which the best Textuary of you all can bring forth no plain, positive, and particular Commands and Examples from the Holy Scripture: And these Circumstances of yours, ye are over-rul'd in, and suffer your selves to be obedient to on a Vassalage to some private man, and it may be, he no great Apostle, yet continuing to blame those, that in as innocent, and much more decent Ceremonies and Circumstances are observant of Authority, and were derived from those men that were not ashamed to live, nor afraid to die for the Gospel.

Moreover, this being the great *Postulatum* of the Science of Non-conformity, and *Novel Puritanism*, may I be so bold as to ask you, whence you had it? Not from the Scriptures I am sure, neither in word, nor sense; not from Examples of Jewish or Christian Church in the Scripture registred, for they both used Ceremonies and Circumstances in Worship,

ship, took them up, and laid them down again without the interposition of a particular Divine Command, and yet are guiltless.

All that I can find of Scriptures that you are wont to alledge for this Opinion, are some conceptions of your own on those Texts that mention God's Holiness and Jealousie, That *thou shalt not add nor diminish*, &c. which have been an hundred times answered to you; and had you been ingenuous, the Answers had long before removed the dotage. You will not say sure, that this is a Principle enforced on you by Spiritual Wisdom, and prudential debates in the understanding of every man that is possessed with a due fear of God; for this were to make your selves the only true Christians, or to be found (if you venture to talk of prudence) in the same Oven wherein you seek to finde, or to put your Adversaries. But the Church of *England* must be cautious in contending against this Principle; for scarce any of her Members do, but they are readily accused for disparaging the fulness of Scripture, for speaking un-Protestantlike of the perfection of that Sacred Volume; and lastly, that Christ, as *Moses* was not faithful in his house.

Which Accusations were they true would signifie, but they are not true; inasmuch as the Members of the Church of *England* have always willingly asserted, and learnedly justified the perfection of Holy Scriptures, as having in them a sufficient and full Revelation of supernatural Truths, and the Substantials of God's Worship; and the advancing moral and civil Duties to a more sublime and spiritual height, by directing them to a more noble end, and exacting performance of them in a holy manner. Bishop *Sanderson* Pref. to 20 *Serm.* But then 'tis added by that renowned Bishop, that this the Protestants do assert without any purpose

pose thereby to exclude belief of what is otherwise reasonable, or the practise of what is prudential. *Idem ibid.*

But the truth is, that Bishop might say what he pleased; my meaning is, that his Exercitations on the Cause of the Church of *England*, as it stands in Controversie with you are above your refuting: Else though Mr. *Hookers's* be a longsome Book, why are not the Right Reverend *Sander-son's* few Sermons, and two Prefaces taken into consideration? For doth he not enervate your Principle, and establish our Ceremonies with that freeness, as if he craved favour from no man's Reason or Learning? Therefore let it be thought no unreasonable request of mine to you who are engaged in this County to the way of dissention from us, if I desire you to peruse that Author, and to proceed moderately (if you can) in your Inconformity, till you or yours have answered him.

Neither can I think the denying of this your Principle will argue an Opinion in those that oppose it, that Christ was less faithful than *Moses*: For, if he hath made known unto us all things that he hath heard of his Father, *John 15. 15.* as to that Errand about which his Father sent him, as *Moses* did in respect of the promulgation of the Laws he received from God for the Instruction and Government of the Israelites, and yet left some circumstances unmentioned, he is not unfaithful, nor his dispensation uncomplete; nor fail'd any more than *St. Paul*, to declare the whole Counsel of God, though he hath said nothing of the *Antipodes*, Motion of the Earth, or World in the Moon; no, nor so much of God's Decrees, as some others have, and continue to do.

What Ceremonies and Circumstances are recorded in the
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New Testament, as the issues of the Will of the Great Captain of our Salvation to be constantly and universally practised in his Church, let him be anathematized that renounceth to them either in Opinion or Practice; and let the Church of *England* stand charged of partiality and falsehood, If any children of her Family will not say, Amen.

But if many Acts of Religion and Piety are commanded in their Substance only in Scripture, and men cannot perform them without circumstance, what should be the Reason (not the pretence) why lawful Authority (which is judge of decencie, and always aims at a blessed Uniformity, and in pursuance thereof enjoyns nothing contrary to the least *iota* of the will of our Saviour) should not determine them? when *de facto* some circumstances will (though variously) be used and determined by every private person.

But should this very obnoxious Principle be allowed you, yet I make a Question, whether you have not exceeded (in your modern cavil) the fairest extension of it: For under pretence of precisely standing to Scripture, and therein often to words, sounds, and syllables, you have rejected some things that are Scriptural in sense and signification, at least in the judgment of those that are as pious and learned as your selves, and infinitely beyond you in number, and Antiquity, yet still within the acknowledged Church of Christ. For what a daring rudeness was it in you to damn Episcopacie (supposing such, as obtains in *England*) as Unscriptural, if the *Jus Divinum* thereof (which is equivalent to the obligation of Scripture) be so fairly pleadable by men, that are ever ready to go down with you into the Sand to defend it at any Weapon in the Spiritual Armory, and are no near

at a loss, or short of you in Piety than Learning. For not to remember your former rage against this Government on the account of the former Principle, or none: I ask, whether ever any Society of men were unchurcht for being govern'd by Bishops, but by you? For to reckon our Episcopacie Antichristian, is as much as to unchurch us. And though the Long-Parliament-Sermons call'd it Prelacie; yet thereby they meant nothing else but our Episcopacie both in sense and execution. But the people must have the new word Prelacie (as then used by you) having something yet left in them of the antient reverence to Episcopacie.

But if the Divine right of Episcopacie be not demonstrable (as I believe it is) yet hath it not as fair pretence thereto, as any of those Hebrew, or Scotch Roots from whence your different Associations are derived? For let it be shewn wherein it comes behind in evidence to your forming and predominant *Theses*, viz. The Doctrine of Lay-Elders, and parity of Ministers; The Doctrine of the Church-Covenant, and Independent-Pastors. Or again, That the Gospel hath so restrained the Subject of Baptism, as to exclude Infants; And, that men may now expect the same degree of conduct and assistance from the Holy Ghost to guide them into all truth, and even to prevent study and meditation, as the Apostles had, &c.

And as it is in Government, so I go on to demand of you in the point of worship. Who ever besides your selves ran away from an explicate Communion with a Church for having a form of Prayer, for kneeling at the Lords-Supper, for the use of the Cross after Baptism, and for the Surplice? when they were declared not essential to Religion, nor substantial in Worship, but recommended, and enjoyned out of Reverence to Antiquity, and zeal for Uniformity by those
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who had Authority over us, yet never asserted any other Authority in such matters, but for edification: Concerning which Ceremonies there is no man among you (who seems to have retained discretion, or a faculty of judging) but only hovers and makes slight reflections, but never proves them to be directly sinful, unless by the former weak, and every where (even among your selves) contradicted Principle.

The Doctrines of the Church of *England* contained in the 39 Articles have of late obtained to some better respect among you, and on a sudden grow into favour with many Dissenters, which one would think were a good pledge of their farther conformity, there being nothing (as I know) in our Government and Worship that is contradictory or abhorrent from those Articles.

But what the reason should be of your approbation, or whether you be not real in it, I know not; but if you are then proceed to examine other matters, and your selves by them. I doubt, if you were urged to subscribe to them, you would again, as heretofore have your exceptions, and only acknowledge for truth in them those which be the great Commandments.

However it were but fair, if you do own our Articles, to let the rest of your Societies know from your own mouths, that there are some good things among us, that they may become more modest in their revilings, who seldome rate us below the Idolatrous, the Superstitious, and Antichristian, not only in one, but in all matters that pertain to us, as a Church.

Perhaps you lay hold on our Articles now as an Argument *ad hominem*, and to beat us (as you think) with our

own Weapon ; for there are great cries among you , as if many that live in conformity to the Church of *England* are departed in their Opinion from the Catholick soundness of the 39 Articles, by espousing Socinianism, of which there is much suspicion, and dread express'd in some late Writers ; but then they charge such persons therewith, that are so clearly not guilty of it, as that they approve and use that Lyturgy, wherein there is a particular Creed against the farce of Socinianism, and are willing (for ought I hear) to give other assurance of their detestation of it, notwithstanding those passages in some late Papers that they have with great confidence accused and condemned.

But if the Doctrine of *Socinus* and his followers hath gotten any credit among us (which God forbid) who may we blame for it but your selves, and your Fore-runners, who could never endure that body of Canons, wherein was one in Title and Doctrine against Socinianism ? It is the fourth Canon agreed on by the severall Synods of *London* and *York* 1640. wherein Socinianism is called a damnable and cursed Heresie, a complication of many antient Heresies condemn'd by the four first General Councils ; and lastly, contrariant to the Articles of Religion now established in the Church of *England*. I know on what Canon or Canons the burden of your clamour was laid, and that the Lawyers helpt you to find out an irregularity in their making (though the Composers had the King's Commission to impower them, and the Canons the King's Declaration before them) yet this Canon underwent the same fate as others, though not so audibly complain'd against ; which I cannot think for all that, but was as well as the rest secretly design'd against by the first Authors of our confusions in Religion : For soon after the Ministers that exercised before the Lords and
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Commons at their Monthly Fasts complain'd against infinite Errors and Heresies, and this (by name) of Socinianism, and that the persons who were guilty of it were not the adherents to Episcopacie, but such as were hearded among the Dissenters, and joyn'd for a pretended Reformation. The matter therefore well considered, though you dislike Socinianism (as well you may) yet you may see whether directly, or by accident, I enquire not, who unhappily ministred to its growth, if not to its first Introduction.

Concerning the Discipline of the Church of *England*, I have found nothing so boldly talkt against, as the particular of Excommunications, as if they were irregularly decreed, and on light and unmeet occasions. But these exceptions are so idle and vain, that they argue either ignorance or unrighteousness in those who first made them. For had they observ'd how, and by whom men are Ecclesiastically censured, they would not think the Keys usurp'd by Lay-men. 'Tis no news to hear Courts and their proceedings first misunderstood, and then misrepresented by those who are obnoxious, or have an itch to rule, and are impatient of Government. Now Government it self being sacred and necessary, they that quarrel at it must begin with the suspected corruptions of it (of which they are neither capable to judge or amend) and so proceed to confusion; but still keeping up to a noise of corruption, till themselves are possess'd of it, and then become abominable.

And as for the causes and occasions of Excommunications, that are insisted on by you to be light and trivial, it is manifest that those who so accuse are very heedless, or very illiterate. For let them but read the ordinary form of that Instrument, and they will find the cause is renouncing to Go-

vernment, and contempt of the Court; that is, when men do not acknowledge the Jurisdiction, or will not submit and acquiesce in its determinations and censures,

Having thus mentioned your Principle of Dissent, and some Applications that you make thereof for your own pitiful defence against the Church of *England*, let me further add something of the ways and manners you observe, or at least are in use among your selves. I have sometime considered your Worshipping of God, and finde, that though you have long handled that Text [*That God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth*] to serve you against those you oppose; yet there is little assurance that there is more spirit or truth in your worship than in your slighted Neighbour's. For, if to worship God in spirit be to joyn the Soul with external performances in God's Worship, what can you say for your selves more, than those from whom you separate, who acknowledg the Doctrine, and profess the practise of the same beyond your disproof, knowing herein they are to be tried by God (and not you) who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins.

But yet have not the Sons of the Church of *England* greater appearances, that their Souls are joyn'd to the material parts of Gods worship than you? when they readily use such Acts and Indications of reverence, as you make Conscience to deny, and a piece of Religion to contemn; nay sometime become distinctly character'd from us by an obstinate and insolent refusal to use them. The Congregations that worship God according to the Canons and Rubricks if the Church of *England* do in Prayer and Communions kneel, in hearing they are uncovered, and in any other constant or contingent Office are decent & orderly; of which they are so far observant, that to prevent any opportunity

tunity for confusion, it is their Principle to submit and conform to a stated rule given them by their Superiours, which is the only guard against indecencie and distraction.

But your Assemblies (those of our County) are otherwise managed. Many profess to come with no other designe than to hear only, and think themselves discharg'd to God and their own wish, if they come time enough to hear a mystical Text pronounc'd, as the warning to a Sermon. This they believe to be the worship of God, or else have knowledge of none. And when they come, there is no difference between them in the Market, and in the Meeting-house, and to say truth, there needs none, that their carriage may bear proportion to the nature of such unlawful Assemblies.

They have been taught, that Preaching and Hearing are the principal Duties of Minister and People, and for the one to preach plain Doctrine, and the other to be uncovered are both superstitious; and moreover, that Superstition is so dangerous, that rudeness is much safer with such-like whimsies, that whenever they are reprov'd for it in our Assemblies, especially in this point of the Hat, they think they are abridged of their Christian Priviledges.

Neither is your Worship better for truth than spirit, if to worship God in truth be to worship him after the manner, that Christ hath revealed him, who is the true God. For, concerning God, nothing is more Emphatical in the Revelation of him by Christ, than, *then that he spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all*, Rom. 8. 32. which Doctrine, that it might be preserved fresh in the memories of Christians, then was an holy Rite instituted by our Saviour, that carried with it the most easie and familiar signification of the same, viz. the Sacrament of the Lords-Supper, which is to be celebrated with such words that do import the
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very Doctrine, whereby is shewn not only our Saviour's care and faithfulness to continue an assertion of the Point; but over and above, that this is the most properly differing Character of the Christian Society.)

But, alas! Of what little use is this among you? your former setting up spiritual Rails by strange and unchristian Niceties hath made a desolation of this Table, not yet to be repaired by the soundest Doctrines and vehementest exhortations to those that otherwise are governable people.

And as for your own Societies (I speak of *Kent*) there is a very little obedience to it, or such obedience as little comports with the merit of the Doctrine it relates to, or the solemnity wherewith it was instituted.

And to my experience, there are some who frequent your Assemblies with good affection, having yet a veneration of that Sacrament do constantly communicate with us, not out of compulsion, or more than ordinary perswasion; but because not in practice in such Meetings of yours, to which they usually betake themselves. I pray then consider how intire & integral your Worship is, especialiy where there is nothing but an *extemporary* prayer and attempts on a Theological Discourse. If in any place the Holy Scriptures are read, I do not hear of any great care or order had for reading the same, in the most material parts thereof; but in many places there is no more use of them than in such Quotations that are brought in to attend the Sermon; and in the rest, the Method or Confusion of reading is left to the discretion of the gifted Brother, Pastor, or Minister, be he young or old, Stranger or home-born. And therefore it is, that the skill your Auditors have in the Scriptures is very narrow, referring only to those Texts which are most in fashion for your Sermons: They observe little connexion or discrimination

tion between Old and N. Testament, nor particularly understand those Scriptures that essentially concern Christianity but are under Rote and Government of such glosses, as you have fixt on those places that appear fairest (at least in sound) for dissent and difference from the Church of England.

This consideration makes me reflect on your way of instruction, supposing instruction of men, not worship of God to be the chief end of your assembling: For if it were not, you could not reasonably lay such streels on Sermons as you do; and you cannot deny, but God may be publickly worshipped without them, and that acceptably too, especially in those places where the Gospel hath been long received, and in such a Church, where there are ways of another name constantly used to instruct the Members thereof. But if you should assemble without Sermons for worship, what will become of you? For you have so long preach'd a woe upon the neglect and very omission of Preaching, that the people (you know) will curse you, if you should but attempt to call them together in any publick Meeting without it. But yet to let this pass, when you are conven'd, your way of instructing one would think might be better advised. I meddle not now with the unaptness of your Subjects to begot Principles of Christianity in your Hearers; and if they were Principles which you teach, how unduly they are proportion'd to their capacities being enveloped with such Phrases, that it were hard for the very Apostles to know their own Doctrines again, or the Primitive Christians to resume their faith and practice of them, if they were to judge and live by your Discourses.

But, say your way of Preaching is mended (for indeed the Writings of Dissenters in other Cities and Countries are,

are, being more congruous to sense, and beginning to be more Orthodox as to Doctrine) what reasons can there be in order to better edification (as you pretend) to neglect the use of the Ten Commandments, publike Catechisms, the Antient Creeds, and the Lords Prayer, which deliver the Elements of Religion in such plain words, and tractable Periods as the meanest judgment and memory may receive and manage them? And if the memory only be first obliged in those wise and blessed accomodations of Divine Truths, they are the nearer to the understanding, and may at last rule in the affections and conversation.

Yet with these you instruct not, but make them all subside to your own private senses and illustrations of Scripture. If this be told abroad to those who are of the Reformed Churches, it will become to their Judgment equally wicked and incredible. That men should pretend to instruction (and the best way too) without a Catechism, or the use of it without the Decalogue, Creeds, or Lords Prayer. For to say you touch on all these in your Pulpit-declamations is but to tell us of a Wild-goose-chase, wherein the Learner though he may come to hear some good, shall never have a form of sound words.

This is the stranger for that these things are omitted, not only on choice, but in opposition to Laws, that enjoyn them: but what speak I of Laws, when as there is no Church or Kingdom on the face of the whole earth that hath better and more wholesome Laws than ours; and yet none so slighted and baffled; not by the Banditi, or men that live without any conduct of Law and Conscience, but by those that pretend to have the greatest apprehension of Religion and liveliest sense of the fear of God? For what Authority hath consulted with greater wisdom and compassion

passion towards those it governs, hath waited with more patience and desire of Conformity and Obedience, or inflicted more gently and tenderly on transgressours than ours? yet what Government hath been more complain'd and libell'd against? That stands reproach'd and foil'd in its wisest Decrees, and most Christian Sanctions to the wonder and astonishment, as well as to the evil Example of all the Nations round about us.

Should other men take your licence to except against Laws that they do not like and abate openly in their Obedience to them as you do, no Law would be regarded, but the constitution of the Kingdom must dissolve. Yet for this you have taught them Principles, and given them Patterns, which they may know how to use in matters of body and estate, as you in your pretended concerns of Soul, and Religion. For, if you may deny Conformity to Law on the account of Conscience towards God in a matter that is not intrinsically evil, or by any word of God absolutely sinful (as you cannot prove any thing in our usages is) then may others also be set on to violate other Laws, which they judge inexpedient, or otherwise; for I know not what reason, do not please them. I believe many of you intend no such evil to your Nation and Country, but then why will you hold and love that Principle, that may be so naturally improv'd to infinite mischiefs?

The time past surely may suffice you to have wrought your own will, the Consequences whereof cannot without horror be contemplated by any that have affection to the Church or Commonwealth. Remember, I pray, your endeavours and oppositions were and are against such a Church, that you cannot accuse of any defect in necessities to Salvation, or hath any thing in use or injunction, that

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may otherwile hazard any mans happineſs (but ſet it forward) that ſhall unite unto it : And yet your oppoſition to it viſibly contradicts ſuch a Doctrine (for ought yet hath been proved) whoſe infringement brings damnation, *viz.* obedience to Authority. Nor are your followers any way better prepared to diſcharge themſelves of being involved in this guilt, but by the precarious Argument of an implicate Belief, that your Leaders are good men, and will not go againſt the Scriptures ; which Scriptures if you would be intreated to look into without Party or Paſſion, and ſo far yield to as you are convinc'd, you would quickly both Leader and Follower, leave your Tents and Camps, and find more comfort (though perhaps not ſucceſs) in obedience than obſtinacie.

Here is nothing (I believe) in this Paper, but ſome of you may have heard, but, I doubt, few of you conſider'd, and therefore my deſign hereby is only to give in familiarly another Memorial, and to renew the inſtance for peace and conformity ; which I do offer to you from the bottom off my heart, without ſenſe of any particular wrong or provocation from you, ſave what is to every Member of the Church of *England* by your reſſions from it, or batteries againſt it.

I need not tell you, that you with us are of one common Nature and Country, but Religion too, for you are wont to defend your ſelves in all aggreſſes upon you by the name and pretence to the cauſe of *English* Proteſtants ; but ſure you were never acknowledged abroad, as you ſtand in your diſagreements from the Church of *England* to be in reſpect of *Forein* Churches either Mother, Siſter, or Daughter, yet will you not ceaſe to multiply diſtinctions from us, and enmities againſt us. Consider how much the right ſpirit of
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Christianity is seen in meekness and peaceableness, which, if they are to be exercised towards all, then doubtless not to be denied to a righteous and innocent Authority.

We ask you not to part with any Christian Vertue or Doctrine, as necessary to a compliance with us, but rather to become more practical in the most eminent points thereof, and that you would leave off to mingle, and prefer your own things before the things of Jesus Christ, his Gospel, and his Church.

There was a time when the Ordinances of a small piece of a Parliament were cried up for Laws by you, and not only Obedience press'd to them on pain of Delinquencie and Damnation, but Neutrality curst, though the very matter of those Laws was either to begin, or justifie Rebellion or Schisme: And shall an integral and full Authority betrampled under your feet in Laws that are for right Religion, peace, and? Unity?

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Christianity is seen in meekness and peaceableness, which
if they are to be exercised towards all, then doubtless not to
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Schism: And still an integral and full Assembly was re-
quired under your Test in Laws that are for right Religion,
peace, and Unity?

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